

Below is my tally for the morning of the 14th of February. At this writing, nothing has changed to improve my position,

1. Theft of one 950x16 wheel and tire in San Angelo, Texas on the night before. San Angelo \$165. Noelke O.
2. Stolen at the same time and in the same city: one bumper jack designed to lift but not to lower a light truck. San Angelo O; Noelke \$32.50.
3. Return of a check from a citizen of Austin, Texas made payable to "Monte Noelke" passes through the First Natl. Bank of Mertzon, marked insufficient funds: debit the account of Monte Noelke, Austin \$35: Noelke.

Giving a score for the St. Valentine's opener of \$167.50 for the out of town team and only the consolation of having lost bumper jack for my side.

Time sequence, or discovery of the crimes fell in the order listed above. After I got the check back in the mail, I sat on the curb in front of the post office reviewing the situation. Chances of recouping the losses were mighty slim. Nick the Greek in the best night he ever had at the tables couldn't squeeze one more brush from a toothpaste tube that'd been thrown away in San Angelo. Houdini at his peak couldn't fool a street kid in Austin.

Here I sat in front of a country post office in a country town, faced with having to apologize to a bank that looks on good out of town checks with about as much zeal as the ladies' study club would on a cage full of trained mice. Blighted by the knowledge that the local sheriff and his staff had all lived in San Angelo, cursed by the thought that if the rest of Valentine's Day was going to be like Valentine's morning, old Noelke had better signal for the bankrupt referee and ask to be sent to the sidelines.

It had to be an inside job. Those Angelo folks all sit together at football games. I've seen them clustering around in groups at cocktail parties. I know how they laugh about Mertzon. And worst of all I knew that telling a San Angelo cop that a spare tire and wheel from a citizen of Mertzon was about as smart as using a letter of recommendation from Billy Carter to get in the White House.

Once I did act, however, I acted fast, I raced to the bank. From the bank, I reported by phone to the sheriff that I'd lost a wheel and tire in San Angelo, probably through a hole in the bed of my pickup.

To appease the bank, I delivered a pledge of vengeance against hot check writers. Further, I swore that if I ever caught that scoundrel from Austin in the Shortgrass Country, I'd notch his ears so deep that the head surgeon at Mayo's Clinic wouldn't be able to restore his hearing.

I've been in Angelo twice since the robbery. Oh, how innocent they look in their aprons and suits, going about their shifty ways. One of them will slip up and park in Mertzon overnight, sometime. Good always triumphs over evil. Sometimes it just takes a while to end the game.